

John Farchette: My earliest memory is probably as a small toddler, when my father took us out there when he was fishing. Mostly looking for mullet and blue crab. Also, for line fishing as well for barracuda.

Kelcie Troutman: What are some of your fondest or most memorable moments at Great Pond?

JF: I think the best ones were during the '60s because I was younger and there was more to do. There was plenty of fish, plenty of everything. And it was good food; it was laughing and jolly times. Watching my parents having a good time, I think, is probably the fondest memory I have of Great Pond as well as the ones that I experienced myself.

KT: Can you describe the state of Great Pond at this time?

JF: It was a thriving tidal lagoon. At high tide, water would go in and flood everything. It was mangrove: red mangroves and black mangroves, white mangroves. It was just a thriving lagoon, and you saw it—as the tide goes out, you would see the fish come out. And it would be schools like a train of fish coming out and going back in again. Soon as they saw us, they would go run back inside. And it was just having that interaction—understanding how fish react to us was I think probably the most telling moment of what the lagoon signified, which was this place for fish to survive and procreate.

KT: What stories were you told by your elders about Great Pond?

JF: The stories mostly were from—of how much fish there was when they were younger, which is even more than what I was seeing. They were saying that it was so much it almost looked like you could walk on the water with how much mullet there was. And that they had already seen degradation in the '60s when I was growing up.

KT: What are some of Great Pond's most important or otherwise interesting uses by the community over time?

JF: I would be honest. I have to be honest. Most of the people in St. Croix had no idea what Great Pond was. It was always considered a stinky, mosquito infested lagoon and had no value. Which is why, in many cases, why a lot of these areas have been allowed to depreciate the way they have.

KT: When you think of Great Pond as it is now, what do you picture? What's the ecological state?

JF: Devastated. Completely destroyed through apathy. They just didn't care. It meant nothing to them. But to fishermen, especially after hurricanes, that's where they went to feed their family. That's where they gathered to go and cook outside and spend time, and many camped. There was fish camps there for as long as I can remember. And it's always been a place for a lot of folks to gather and eat and have a good time and raise their children in an area where—you know, you don't realize it at the time, but as you grow older you learn to appreciate these kinds of areas.

KT: What ecological state or uses do you want to see either improved, restored, or added to at Great Pond?

JF: Number one would be the tidal flow. Without the tidal flow, there is no life. The ocean is ram-pack full of life. It's where all the eggs are, it's where all the young larval animals are. Now without that intrusion into an area where it can survive, in an area of low mortality by hiding and structure that is provided by natural vegetation—it's what makes it work. Tidal flow would be number one and number two would be the vegetation.

KT: What are some things that you think have contributed to the change and degradation of Great Pond over time?

JF: As I mentioned before, apathy. You know, as I was growing up it was mostly Hispanics that I saw at Great Pond and in particular, Great Pond. We also went to Altona, which also was another one. But most of the Hispanic folks were out at Great Pond. And that's who basically used it for subsistent living.

KT: What do you think are some of the things that contributed to its degradation over time?

JF: Poor land use has to be the number one. And we see that now because of how much sediment is inside the Pond and its upland development. You look at the Mt. Washington subdivision, the Marienhoj, the Union Mt. Washington as well now is spreading—(site?) estate site as well. Those are all houses now that provide no water diffusion of energy. It just allows the water to go and gives it the motion it needs to be able to move down towards the Pond and take sediment with it. Where before, that was not the case; the watershed was able to absorb all that water, and then infiltrate it in and do the way it should be done through the natural process.

KT: What are some things you think can be done to slow down or stop the degradation of Great Pond?

JF: Number one is address the dams. All the dams that were put in by USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] were well intended. They are sediment ponds; they actually can hold sediment. They also have to be maintenance dredged, just like any pond has to be so that you can remove all that clay that reflects water as opposed to absorb water, and then harden the bank so that they don't overflow and spill and cause what's called sheet flowing. And then that way you control that water, and you hold it in place so that it can infiltrate into the ground, into the aquifer and recharge the aquifer. And that's the way you want the water to travel, under the ground as opposed to on top of the ground.

KT: What do you remember about the impacts of major hurricanes like Hugo and Marilyn to the area of Great Pond?

JF: Number one is sediment. The amount of rain and the amount of wind that being generated by these storms creates just this tremendous amount of water concentrated over a small period of time. And then the breaking down of vegetation so that then all that water moving towards the lowest part—which is the pond—picks up dirt and takes it and delivers it to the pond. And that I

believe is what caused, in Hugo in particular, for all that sediment to start building up inside the pond and allowed the level of water to lower, which allows red mangroves to grow and propagate and be able to thrive. Thus, exacerbating the sedimentology transfer and accreting so much sediment as opposed to a pond that was basically a floodplain that was able to control flooding by its existence, and allowing the water to go back to the ocean.

KT: What is the story about Great Pond that you would hope to see endure over time and change?

JF: A marine hatchery nursery area of low mortality for the propagation of local species so that they can repopulate Great Pond Bay.

[inaudible]

KT: What kind of species do you think [inaudible]

JF: There isn't just one. There's snook, there's the mutton snapper, the mojarra—yellowfin mojarra—the blue crab, the lobster, the conch. All of those were found within the Pond and in the Bay, and we need to have that area start to produce again. And in particular, the white mullet, which eats so much algae and helps for the water quality.

KT: Who else do you think we should ask about the history of Great Pond?

JF: Mr. Schuster, who grew up there as well—Robert Schuster. Any of the [inaudible] that are left—I believe it's just his daughter, (Carmen?). Julio Encarnacion who also grew up there as well with his family. The (Torrens?), who are up in the in the western corner. Those are all families who lived and were fed by the Pond. And you know, back when I was young, we didn't have the grocery stores we have today. We went hunting and fishing to supplement our food that we bought from the store, which was mostly (saltfish?) and cornmeal and rice because we didn't grow those. But what the rest of it was the conch, the lobster, the fish, the birds that we shot to supplement our diet.

KT: Did you ever collect salt in Great Pond?

JF: No.

[inaudible]

Unknown speaker: I have one more question. In addition, say, to restore the (type?) of flushing, one benefit obviously is the (fish nursey?). Are there other benefits that you see—either benefits or improvements that you will see come out naturally as a function of the (sediment?) flushing and fish restoration?

JF: The Pond depends on how much water comes in because she regulates salinity through the influx of seawater. So, if you have a high salinity like we got now, that would be completely changed to a lower salinity because the ocean would flush in and out until eventually, she would

stabilize that salinity. Second would be the sediment. That Pond has in the past, and probably will in the future if we restore it, remove that sediment slowly but surely—especially if we dredge along the perimeter and make that deeper so that it causes this finger of water, a column of water. And water doesn't compress—so she'll pull with the low tide, and she'll come in with water again, and pull with water coming out. Because as she comes out the mouth, she makes an immediate right turn because there's a littoral current—there was documented in the paperwork that was done by Farleigh Dickinson University. So it's something that's already on paper. And we can actually look at aerial photographs, and you can see that sediment plume, as it's coming out of the Pond, makes an immediate right. And that's why those beds of seagrasses—a myriad of seagrasses, there's not just turtle grass. There's the manatee grass, there's that one that's a crystal coralline algae that grows as well that all control that sediment, and hold that sediment, and use that sediment with the nutrients that are within it to grow and make even more, which is what protects not just the shoreline, but the coral reefs that are out on the banks.

Unknown speaker: Can you speak to the history about Great Pond, in particular about people first arriving to St. Croix in [inaudible] ecological side of things?

JF: The pre-Columbians were adept at finding areas that could keep them—especially arable land, in particular, and that has a nice alluvial plain as you can see from the aerial photographs, which is where the Eastern Marine Park is. But it's a flat ground and that's what they needed. But more importantly was that invertebrates—the place was full of clams on the outside. They had oysters inside the mangrove roots. And then of course, the blue crabs. They would have exploited all of those. And that one there is three hundred, seven hundred eighty. So we have evidence of how long they were there, and we know how much density was there because it was a large contingent. Not just there, but it also occurred in Robins Bay, and it also occurred over by Longford as well as just before Manchenil. We have photographs from Lowry Hill overlooking the back of a (Dane?) while he's getting his picture taken that Great Pond had no trees in the middle. That was circa 1867. So we know how long that Pond has been working to do what it's doing. And then a 1769 (Biggs?) wrote that they had tested the fish by a fishmonger over at the Pond, and that it was available for everyone to come and eat. And that's documented in the *Avis* [*St. Croix Avis* newspaper] write-up that they put in the paper to allow people—or encourage people to come and get fish. That's how long Great Pond has been producing, not just pre-Columbian, but colonial times as well.

KT: About how many students would you say that you have taken to Great Pond over time? How many generations?

JF: At least at minimum—at least one, right? Because I think in '08, '09 school year, we were able to pull two thousand kids through there. And all of them went to Great Pond—Great Pond was the one original tour. There were several other tours, but we always started out with Great Pond because it gave us that as a visual aid to make them understand and see what was occurring there—and what you couldn't see, but that once you're told you can't help but understand that that's what it is. But in '09, 2010, it was five thousand children came through the program at Great Pond—of local schools, from kindergarten to twelfth grade.

Unknown speaker: [inaudible] one last question?

[inaudible]

Unknown speaker: Regarding climate change, what's your take on how climate change—(be it?) sea level rise, future storms, future droughts, rain events—might impact the Pond? Whether it improves it or makes it worse, and how you might see it play out in the next fifty to one hundred years?

JF: One thing for sure we can all agree on is that the ocean is rising, it is coming at us. The Arctic is melting, so that's producing more water into the ocean. Greenland, ice glaciers are melting, they are going into the ocean, they're finally reaching that saturation point where rivers and lakes have been absorbing that water but no longer is able to do that. So, the ocean come in. If we don't open Great Pond, Great Pond is going to get opened. But if we open it, we get to control it. And it's all about controlling water. If we don't control water, it'll wipe us out. We have to find ways—not just removing ourselves from the shoreline, which is just a natural progression that we're going to have to do because houses is going to be underwater. Your living room will be a coral reef so you're not going to be able to sit there. So opening the pond allows the ocean to go inland, and she has the room to get in and she has the room to get out so that she doesn't flood infrastructure like route sixty, which is the main south shore road. Because if we don't open it, she's going to flood. She gets very close now, just by the Pond the channel getting a little clogged up, the rising water level gets really high. But if we open it, she has a way to drain and come out, and it does a great job of flood control without our intervention.

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Reviewed by Cameron Daddis, 06/07/2024